LAW CLASS  
How Courts Work

Steps in a Trial

Settling Cases

Relatively few lawsuits ever go through the full range of procedures and all the way to trial. Most civil cases are settled by mutual agreement between the parties. A dispute can be settled even before a suit is filed. Once a suit is filed, it can be settled before the trial begins, during the trial, while the jury is deliberating, or even after a verdict is rendered.

A settlement doesn’t usually state that anyone was right or wrong in the case, nor does it have to settle the whole case. Part of a dispute can be settled, with the remaining issues left to be resolved by the judge or jury.

Criminal cases are not settled by the parties in quite the same way civil cases are. However, not every case goes to trial. The government may decide to dismiss a case, or be ordered to do so by a court. The defendant may decide to plead guilty, perhaps as a result of negotiations with the government that result in dismissing some of the charges or recommending a lighter prison sentencing. Plea bargains are a very important and efficient way to resolve criminal cases